



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Washington standards for metals in fertilizer appear protective

OLYMPIA – A 1998 state law that established limits on the levels of nine metals in commercial fertilizers distributed in Washington is doing its job of protecting consumers and the environment, according to Bob Arrington, assistant director for the state Department of Agriculture's Pesticide Management Division.

Arrington bases that statement in part on a recently released study conducted by Washington State University in cooperation with the departments of Agriculture, Health and Ecology. The three-year study, summarized in *A Report on the Plant Uptake of Metals from Fertilizers*, assesses the potential of plants such as wheat, potato, lettuce and cucumber to absorb, or take up, trace metals from fertilizers.

"Study results indicate that existing state standards for arsenic, cadmium and lead in fertilizer appear to be sufficiently protective at this time," Arrington said. The study was conducted under field and greenhouse conditions in Puyallup and Prosser. Its purpose was to assess the likelihood of plant uptake and soil accumulation of these metals with continual fertilizer applications.

Although study results do not indicate the need for action at this time, the state agencies involved would like to see additional studies performed. Officials are recommending that:

- WSU should extend its study for at least two years and focus on the development of improved ways to predict plant uptake of cadmium.
- A long-term program should be developed to measure arsenic, cadmium, and lead levels in soil to ensure that they do not become a concern in the future.
- A process should be initiated to develop a regional approach addressing metals standards and labeling.

Agriculture and Ecology staff members are discussing ways to carry out a long-term soil monitoring program. Additionally, regulatory and fertilizer industry representatives are discussing the possibility of establishing national labeling standards to provide information about the levels of metals in fertilizers.

Washington standards for metals in fertilizer set limits for nine metals including arsenic, cadmium, lead, cobalt, mercury, molybdenum, nickel, selenium and zinc.

For a copy of the report summary and other information on metals in fertilizer, visit the WSDA Web site at www.wa.gov/agr and click on "Metals In Fertilizer."

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